# The Common Market Decision in Norway: A Clash between Direct and Indirect Democracy\*

#### 1. Introduction

The September 1972 referendum on Norway's accession to the Common Market appeared to surprise most commentators abroad and quite a few Norwegians as well. But the possibility of a 'no' could scarcely have been overlooked by anyone who had followed developments in the Norwegian polls. All 26 polls from August 1971 to September 1972 (by two independent polling agencies) regarding the dichotomous choice of 'for' or 'against' had shown a majority against joining. In other polls earlier in 1971 the full membership alternative had also consistently been chosen by a small minority only, when respondents were confronted with three alternatives (full membership, a looser tie, no tie at all).

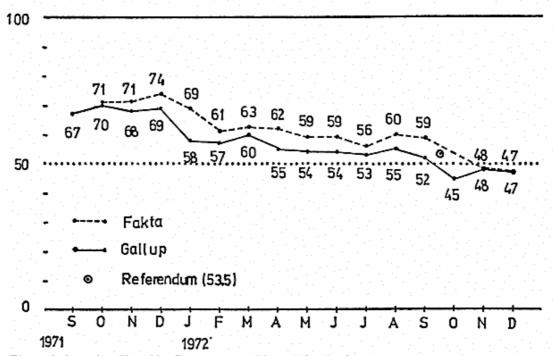


Figure 1. Intend to Vote No, Percentage of Those Who Took a Position.

Sources: FAKTA's and Gallup's polls for the period September 1971-December 1972. The question asked has not been identical over the whole period, but has always referred to a dichotomous choice between yes and no to full membership. The size of the 'uncertain' category (including refusals, those who do not intend to vote, and those who have not yet made up their mind) has varied considerably, partly due to slight changes in interviewing technique. For FAKTA the percentages of uncertain respondents were: 41, 41, 39, 39, 34, 37, 34, 36, 17, 20, 15, 15, 13, 14. For Gallup: 27, 24, 27, 28, 21, 23, 27, 27, 24, 19, 21, 21, 12, 8, 5, 8. The January 1972 Gallup result may have been influenced by a biased (pro-EEC) question preceding it in the interview schedule. The April 1972 FAKTA figure is the arithmetic mean of two questions biased in opposite directions.

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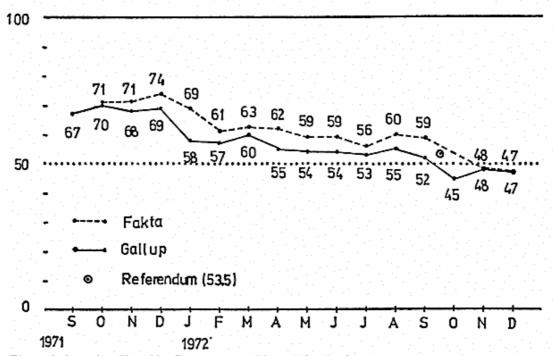


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### The Development of Public Opinion: Trend and Panel Data

The development of public opinion in 1971–1972 is shown in Figure 1. Although the polls are too infrequent over the first ten years to say anything very conclusive, it seems reasonable to suggest that public opinion was relatively favorable to negotiations and perhaps also to the EEC in general, but that most preferred a tie less close than full EEC membership. Although the Common Market issue was extremely hotly debated in 1962, interest waned in succeeding years and seriously picked up only toward the end of 1970. At this point the 'Popular movement against Norwegian membership in the EEC' (Folkebevegelsen) was formed. At the end of 1970 support for the membership alternative declined to about half its previous level. A majority could no longer be found even for continuing the negotiations. From the beginning of 1971 polling activity increased considerably. For the period depicted in Figure 1, questions were asked by both institutes on a monthly basis.

By the fall of 1971 it was becoming evident that the public would be presented with a dichotomous choice in the referendum and the corresponding question became the central one in the polls. When forced to choose for or against full membership, most adherents of the middle alternative intended to vote no.<sup>3</sup> This accounts for the increase in the proportion of no's during the last months of 1971. EEC supporters, on the other hand, gained heavily in January 1972 (when the negotiations were completed) and in February. From that point, public opinion seemed to stabilize. The pro side made two further jumps (in April and September) but the long-awaited 'trend toward yes' never appeared and the gains for the yes's were not large enough to avoid a defeat on the referendum day.

As always with trend data, one must be cautious not to interpret the stability of aggregate opinion during 1971 and 1972 as a sign of stability at the individual level. A panel study with interviews in November 1971 and a mail questionnaire seven months later indicates that the total amount of individual changes was twice as large as the net change in aggregate opinion during this period. Table I shows the exchanges that had taken place between the two competing groups and the undecided.

Table I. Panel	Data on	Public	Opinion	on	the	EEC	in	November	1971	and	July	1972,
Percentages*												

Opinion in		Total						
July 1972	For	 Against		Undeci	ded	Total		
For Against Undecided	15 1 1	6 30 7		14 14 12		35 45 20		
Total	17	43		40		100		

<sup>\*</sup> Percentage of grand total. One third of the November sample did not answer the mail questionnaire in July, with response rates 76 percent for the yes group, 65 percent for the no's, and 57 percent for the undecided. In the Table the answers for the different groups are weighted so as to give the panel a distribution of November opinion equaling that of the entire sample. The data were collected by FAKTA for Folkebevegelsen.

While stable at the aggregate level, the no group lost nearly a third of its members during this relatively short time span. But this was offset by gains from the two other groups. Contrary to the common impression, the no group had recruited as many new members from the undecided as had the yes group.

### The Gap: Voters vs Representatives

However, ignorance of the polls was not the only cause for surprise at the outcome of the election. Majorities in the polls apart, the *composition* of the two contending parties made it hard to believe in a victory for the opposition. In most sectors of Norwegian society the centers of power seemed to be lined up on the yes side. In the political sector, narrowly defined, this found a telling expression in the fact that only one fourth of the national assembly (the Storting) opposed membership at a time when almost three-fourths of those voters who had taken a position were against. As the referendum drew nearer, the gap narrowed from both sides. The voters had moved about 20 percentage points to a 53.5-46.5 percent split in the referendum. In the Storting some 3-5 percent of the members had come out as opponents in addition to the 25 percent who in June 1971 voted against continued negotiations for membership. Even so, there remained a gap of more than 20 percent with majorities in opposite directions among voters and representatives.

The post-referendum situation has been dubbed 'Monday blues for the Norwegian establishment.' The common expectation that leaders in a democracy should be responsive to the wishes of the voters made the situation especially awkward for political leaders who had thrown all their prestige into the struggle. It is not, however, our intention to engage in a discussion on the merits of a referendum in the EEC issue. The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on the question of how the two different mechanisms for linking public opinion to policy could yield such divergent results.

At this point, a caveat: one should not exaggerate the conflict between the two ways of 'processing' the EEC issue. The Storting yielded its own power over the final outcome to a referendum by unanimous decision, and the outcome of the referendum was accepted (or, as it is commonly expressed, 'taken note of') by the majority of representatives who had had their own choice rejected by the voters. Also the requirement of a 'qualified majority' (three-fourths) needed for a decision of the Storting in favor of full membership would have given the 30 percent of the representatives who were opposed an effective veto, had there been no referendum (provided, of course, that they had not yielded to the tremendous pressure). The clash between direct and indirect democracy is therefore not so extreme in Norway as in Great Britain, where a simple majority in Parliament voted Britain into the Common Market against a majority of the voters.<sup>4</sup>

#### Linkages between Public Opinion and Policy

It seems reasonable to postulate that the channel of direct democracy gives the most accurate representation of public opinion. Any divergence between the outcomes of direct and indirect processing of an issue may therefore be regarded as a result of some kind of 'distortion' of the voters' opinion in passing through the indirect channel.

Public opinion may be brought to bear on the decisions of the representative assembly in many specific ways. Every expression of opinion is, at least potentially, a means of influencing representatives – from active efforts like promoting an alternative candidate at the next election, to passive ones like answering a question in an opinion poll. Of special consequence is the organized activity of interest groups, be they ad hoc or permanent. We have little empirical material and no space for a discussion here of what has been called the 'corporate channel of indirect democracy.' Suffice it to say that most large organizations also make use of a representation system to elicit the opinion of their members, and that this frequently gives rise to exactly the same kind of gap between leadership and rank and file as in the political system. It may well be, then, that the gap between voters and representatives is not an anomaly of political life but a result of a much more general process in representative systems.

With regard to most expressions of opinion, the representative is free to decide how much attention to pay to them. There are, however, two ways in which popular opinion may make itself felt in a more forceful way. Through elections voters decide the party composition of the national assembly. And as party members they may participate in the formation of the platform and the nomination of candidates for public office. We shall now examine these mechanisms more closely.

#### Elections

In the period 1961-1972 there were three parliamentary elections. Great Britain applied for membership a month before the 1961 election but, apart from the small Communist Party (NKP) and the newly formed Socialist People's Party (SF), the parties did not take a stand or even debate the matter seriously. A three-fourths majority of the Storting voted in April 1962 to apply for membership, but the issue became dormant after de Gaulle's veto against British entry in January 1963. In the 1965 election the question stayed entirely in the background. In 1967 Britain renewed her application and Norway followed her lead again, but a second no from de Gaulle followed before negotiations could even be started. Again in 1969 the two leftist parties (NKP and SF) failed to attract much attention to the EEC issue during the election campaign. Then, barely three months after the election, came the Hague meeting that paved the ground for British entry. In June 1970 the Norwegian membership application was renewed.

Through a mixture of chronological accident and unwillingness on the part of the political parties to face the issue in an election, the EEC issue never formed part of a general election campaign before the referendum. Other data, however, seem to indicate that even if EEC membership had been a central issue in one of the previous election campaigns, its impact on the outcome of the election would not have been sufficient to change the balance of power in the Storting. The opposition would probably still have held between a fourth and a third of the seats in parliament rather than half or more.

This does not mean, however, that the EEC decision will not have an impact on Norwegian politics. At the time of writing it seemed likely that the EEC would be a major issue in the 1973 campaign. A simulation of the 1973 election based on interview data from November-December 1972 yields some gains for SF and the equally antimarket Center Party (SP) (formerly Agrarian). Much of this can be traced back to the disintegration (a strong decline in voter support followed by an organized split after the referendum) of the Liberal Party, a process only partly linked to the EEC issue. As nominations for the Storting seats progress in the divided parties, particularly the Labor Party, considerable changes may occur, however. An organized split in the Labor Party would be the most farreaching event to come out of the EEC issue.

That elections between parties do not lead to a mirroring of public opinion on concrete issues in the composition of the assembly, is of course an observation not restricted to the EEC issue. The party structure at any given point in time is the outcome of a historical development along many conflict dimensions, and is protected against sudden changes by strong social loyalties on the part of the voters. The complexity and inertia of voting habits make it unlikely that even such an intense conflict as the EEC issue can change the party structure in a short time so much as to make it coincide completely with the dividing lines of the new conflict. In some parties at least there will remain internal divisions of opinion. This points to the importance of the second mechanism mentioned, the processing of issues within parties. With internal divisions of opinion, not only the strength of the parties but the representation of the various factions within the parties becomes decisive for the correspondence between the opinion of electors and elected.

### Party Platforms

The processing of issues within the parties may be seen as a two-way flow of influence. Through an indirect system with many steps the members may decide the official position of the party on an issue and thereby influence the action of party leaders. At the same time, however, the rank-and-file may be influenced by the policy of the leaders and by their own participation in the decision-making process. More specifically: the outcome of the national meeting may be fairly obvious in advance, but going through the motions of a democratic procedure helps retain the loyalty even of those who disagree with the decision. Labeling these two processes the 'upward' and the 'downward' flow of influence respectively, we shall first examine the upward flow of influence in the EEC decision.

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Table II shows the division of opinion on various levels within the parties and for different points in time (wherever relevant and feasible). For the voters, the first line gives the position at the start of formal decision-making within the parties, with election of local representatives to the district conferences of the parties. Most district conferences were held early in 1972 and elected delegates to the national party conferences that took place in the spring of 1972.

Comparing vertically, we get an impression of the upward channeling of opinion in the party hierarchy. In the near-unanimous no parties, the small minority of dissenters are almost entirely unrepresented above the voter level; among the conservatives, opposition to the EEC vanishes above the member level. In the three remaining parties, the split extends all the way to the top, and two of them are more evenly divided at the voter level. For the liberals (V), a remarkable correspondence is found between voters and intermediate levels up to the national conference, while the parliamentary group is entirely out of line. In the Christian People's Party members seem to resemble voters in their strong opposition to membership, but there is a gradual decline in opposition at higher levels. The extreme case is the Labor Party, where the difference between one level and the next is more consistent and the size of the gap between top and bottom greater than in any other party. Given the relatively small number of party members picked up by the sample and the changes from fall to spring, it is impossible to judge reliably whether the main split runs between voters and members or between members and representatives. But it is evident that in the Labor Party the most important filter is located at the lower levels of the hierarchy, whereas in the Liberal Party we find it near the top.

The hierarchical profile for the Labor Party shows some interesting variations for different parts of the country. In the central region (Oslo and Akershus) the proportion of EEC opponents is relatively stable as we move upward, with a slight dip at the member level. In northern Norway the differences are rather remarkable. Using membership data from a late stage in the decision-making process, we see that voters and members appear relatively similar in the north, whereas in the central region the members are the most pro-EEC group. In the other regions the pattern falls somewhere in between the two extremes shown in the Table.

Clearly, then, this underrepresentation of opponents of the EEC at the higher levels of several of the political parties cannot be accounted for simply by the 'natural' underrepresentation of a minority viewpoint through a series of elections of representatives. It is a *majority* of opponents who are underrepresented at the top in the Liberal and Christian People's Parties and to some extent in the Labor Party.

This points to the importance of studying the form of the decision-making process, especially at the local and district levels, where the least is known today. A tentative suggestion on the basis of the present data is that the underrepresentation of a non-establishment viewpoint can be avoided only if opposition factions are able to communicate and organize freely. This was certainly the case in the Labor Party in Oslo. The

Table II. Opposition to EEC Membership at Different Levels in the Parties, Percentage of Those Who Had Taken a Position\*

Level	No Parties			Yes Party	Divid	ied Par	rties	Labor Party only		
Level	NKP	NKP SF		H	KrF	v	Α	Center	North	
Voters December 1971- February 1972	93	93	95	23	80	57	63	55	80	
Referendum (September 1972)	(91)	93	92	17	75	57	46	45	61	
Members November 1971	(100)	(100)	100	19	(80)	(56)	52	_	_	
April-July 1972	(85)	100	99	13	81	59	35	30	52	
District Conference (Early 1972)	100	100	97	1	69	57	29	34	31	
National Conference (Spring 1972)	100	100	100	2	59	57	24	35	12	
Parliamentary Group (1972)	_		100	0	50	38	16	44	8	

<sup>\*</sup> Parties: NKP = Norwegian Communist Party, SF = Socialist People's Party, S = Center (Agrarian) Party, H = Conservatives, KrF = Christian People's Party, V = Liberals, A = Labor Party.

Regions: Center = Oslo and Akershus, North = Nordland, Troms and Finnmark.

Voters: Party voted for in the last election to the Storting (in 1969), with the exception of the FAKTA polls in the first period (party the respondent felt closest to). Figures for the first period are the mean of three Gallup and three FAKTA polls. Vote in the referendum is the mean of one Gallup and one FAKTA poll (both from November 1972), and the poll taken by the Central Bureau of Statistics shortly after the referendum (only the first two for the regional Labor Party breakdown).

Members: November 1971 data from the FAKTA panel study (percentages with bases less than 25 in parentheses). Data for 1972 from a Gallup poll in April, a FAKTA poll in June, and the panel in July.

District Conferences: Mean in the various districts weighted on the basis of size of the delegation to National Conference. The figures for the homogeneous parties are somewhat uncertain because of cases without formal registration of votes, incomplete reporting, etc. National Conference: Vote of the conference (national board for the Center Party). For the Labor Party regional breakdown: vote of the delegations from the districts in question. Parliamentary group: Percentage of the representatives known to be in opposition to Norwegian EEC membership before the referendum. Estimates for the Labor Party vary between 15 and 18 percent. NKP and SF were unrepresented in the Storting.

Leninist past of the Labor Party survives in many aspects of the party organization, and a ban on organized factions still exists in the party regulations. But an explicit exception was made in the case of the EEC debate – although in an ex post facto manner with a view to saving the rule, while it was being violated every day anyway. The center of the anti-EEC faction was in Oslo, and the national network was rather weak. Numerous local factions existed, but rarely well enough organized to present a challenge to the established leadership during the election of representatives to the Labor Party conference about the EEC. At the time of writing, however, it became obvious that the challenge was considerably stronger in the process of nominating candidates for the Storting.

Whatever the reasons for the varying hierarchical profiles, the consequences of the decision of the national party conferences are interesting in themselves. The conferences appear to have had little, if any, impact on the opinion of Storting members. None of the pro-EEC members for the Liberals and Christians changed their minds after the clear majorities against EEC at the two national conferences. And with one possible exception, EEC opponents in the Labor Party group also held onto their views.

If the division of opinion among the party groups in the Storting had mirrored the party conferences', this would have raised the percentage of parliamentary opposition to the EEC to 35 percent. How this should have been brought about is not clear, however. The Liberal and Christian People's Parties have adhered to the doctrine that the representative shall not be bound by decisions of the party organization, so the lack of changes in these two party groups is not surprising. In the Labor Party there is both doctrine and precedence for binding the representatives by decision of the party conference (e. g. the Nato issue in 1948). The general secretary (and many others) in the Labor Party claimed the same principle for the EEC issue, but with little effect. Had this strategy been effected the different application of the principles of free vs bound representatives would have worked in favor of the EEC supporters in each of the three divided parties, thus further decreasing the representativeness of the Storting.

#### Impact of Party Decisions on Voter opinion

Neither of the two mechanisms for indirect voter influence over a specific issue (elections between parties, decision-making within parties) has worked well in the EEC issue. There is no reason to believe that the EEC issue is atypical in this respect. What makes this issue extraordinary – apart from its scope and importance for the country – is the resistance of public opinion to shift in the direction of the political leaders when these announced their position and pressed for support.

Table II has been used in discussing the channeling of opinion upward in the party hierarchy, but it also gives a picture of the reverse process. Starting with the outcome of the national conference, the two sets of figures for voters and members — one from the beginning of the active 'marketing' period, the other from the end — indicate how the party decision influenced the rank-and-file. The major change occurred in the Labor Party. The post-referendum swing towards a yes position — enough to produce a small majority of supporters (52 percent) over opponents (48 percent) of membership — can also largely be accounted for by changes among Labor voters. The Labor Party leadership tried to make the referendum into a vote of confidence for the Labor government, thus forcing an interpretation of 'no confidence' on the result. While this strategy had some effect before the referendum, it succeeded in altering the balance only after the Labor government had lost the referendum and had resigned.

In the two other divided parties, the impact of the party conferences on the voters appears negligible.

## Center-Periphery Conflicts and Indirect Democracy

As the EEC decision in Norway shows, there can be a considerable gap between the positions produced in the direct and the indirect channels. We have argued that this is no accident for this particular issue. Internal party decision-making does not secure proportional representation for a nonestablishment viewpoint. Nor does competition between parties work either: many voters simply will not change either position or party even when they disagree with their party on the most central issue in the campaign. Well aware of this, representatives can deviate considerably from their voters without worrying unduly about the next election. And voters will sometimes be disloyal to their party and ignore the pressure and advice from the top. An extreme case was provided by

the fishing community of Bø in northern Norway, home of the Labor fisheries minister Magnus Andersen: the community voted 49 percent Labor in 1969 and 92 percent no in September 1972. It remains to be seen if a sufficient number of issues have been accumulated and enough friction generated for the voters to change loyalties in future elections.

Furthermore, the divergence between direct and indirect issue-processing has a systematic character. The group favored by indirect democracy is not just a random collection of individuals who happen to be in positions of power when the decision-making process is initiated. Except for the three near-unanimous anti-EEC parties, the pro-EEC position was always found to be stronger at higher levels within the party hierarchies, regardless of who held the majority at the voter level.

The conflict over the EEC issue was a conflict between center and periphery, in a wide sense.<sup>6</sup> Basically, there are two interpretations of this conflict structure. One is in terms of innovation theory, that the EEC as a new idea had not yet penetrated to the periphery. Or, in terms of interest group theory: Norwegian membership in the EEC was in the interest of the more powerful, the better educated, etc. Either interpretation is consistent with the data, so for our purposes here we need not discuss the relative value of each explanation.

The center-periphery nature of the conflict is, however, highly important for understanding how indirect channels served to bolster support for a pro-EEC position. One of the most well-established empirical regularities of Western societies is the higher participation, in social and political affairs, by those with higher social position. This applies to electoral participation but even more to higher levels of activity, such as party membership.

Apart from the lower interest and involvement of the periphery, qualifications closely linked with education and job status count heavily in the selection of candidates for public office. Low-status persons who reach the pinnacles of power at the same time leave their original social environment and may gradually be socialized into new modes of thinking. The higher the number of representative levels, then, the fewer the low-status persons who will proceed to the top and the less representative the low-status persons who do. Such a process can explain the decrease in EEC opposition from one level to the one above in parties such as the Labor Party. Whether or not there is political discrimination above and beyond the center-periphery effect cannot be judged on the basis of data presented here.

The most efficient counterweight to center domination is a strong ideology of identification with the periphery that cuts through the 'natural' establishment-thinking of the center. In social welfare questions, the ideological factor is no doubt a strong countervailing power in the Labor Party. In foreign affairs, no such ideology exists, since the party abandoned neutralism and antimilitarism after World War II. A major failure of the Labor Party leadership was its failure to realize how its position on the EEC issue ran directly counter to established domestic interests and ideologies.

The periphery is handicapped in direct democracy, as well. Organizations, mass media, and other means for influencing public opinion are largely controlled by the center. Even so, in the final decision each voter has one and only one vote, and this vote influences the outcome directly. In a center-periphery conflict, the periphery will usually do better in a direct than in an indirect processing of the issue.

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#### NOTES

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- Tord Høivik, Ottar Hellevik, and Nils Petter Gleditsch, 'Folkeopinionen og EEC' (Public Opinion and the EEC), Samtiden 80 (April 1971), pp. 239-260. Reprinted in Susan Høivik (ed.), Ti innlegg om EEC, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1971.
- Monthly polls were carried out by two private institutes, FAKTA and the Norwegian Gallup Institute. The Central Bureau of Statistics carried out a survey in September 1972, with half the sample interviewed before the referendum and the other half afterwards.
- Ottar Hellevik, Tord Høivik, and Nils Petter Gleditsch: 'Folkemeininga om EEC i 1971'
  Public Opinion on the EEC in 1971), Syn og Segn 78, No. 2 (1972), pp. 105-117. Reprinted
  in Susan Høivik and Sverre Lodgaard, (eds.); Seks nye innlegg om EEC, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1972.
- Nils Petter Gleditsch and Helge Hveem, 'Den Britiske EEC-opinionen' (British Public Opinion on the EEC), Samtiden 2 (1972), pp. 119-128.
- 5. Actually, the conflict over the EEC is a center-periphery conflict in all the countries we have studied: England, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. For comparative data from the three Scandinavian countries, see Nils Petter Gledistsch, 'Generaler og fotfolk i utakt. EF-avgjørelsen i de tre skandinaviske land' (Generals and Rank-and-File Out of Step in the Common Market Issue), Internasjonal Politikk 4b (1972), pp. 795-804.
- 6. Conceptually, one may distinguish between the dichotomies of center and periphery (in terms of distance from where decisions are made) and individuals of high and low social position, cf. Sivert Langholm, 'On the Concepts of Center and Periphery,' Journal of Peace Research 8, Nos. 2-4 (1971), pp. 273-278. But this distinction is not important here and we use the two sets of concepts interchangeably. See also Johan Galtung, 'Foreign Policy Opinion as a Function of Social Position,' Journal of Peace Research 1, Nos. 3-4 (1964), pp. 206-231.